



## **Wildlife Expedition in Costa Rica - Experience marine and rainforest expedition life in this biodiversity hotspot**

### **Översikt**

This adventurous expedition gives individuals the opportunity to work, explore and live in one of the most remote regions of the Costa Rican rainforest on the Caribbean Coast, whilst contributing to vital conservation projects. The expedition plays a vital role in the development and management of the long-term wildlife conservation of the Tortuguero National Park and Tortuguero Conservation Area. The main projects involve: conducting marine turtle monitoring and conservation, study of jaguar predation on marine turtles, aquatic bird monitoring and jaguar, large mammal and prey species studies.

### **Expeditionen**

Volunteers are based at a specially created research station that sits in the heart of the National Park forest running behind the Caribbean beach. It is surrounded by lush tropical rainforest filled with a variety of wildlife and regular sightings of monkeys and even jaguar prints around the base. There is no road access to the region, so all transportation is via canoe and motor boat through the stunning canals and rivers that meander through the tropical rainforest.

GVI's work is carried out on behalf of and in conjunction with local, national and international partners. GVI is working with the Costa Rican Ministry for Energy and the Environment (MINAE) to develop and sustain the long-term conservation of the Tortuguero area.

A brief but intensive training period prepares volunteers to begin working on the research programmes, after which time you will continue to learn, with each survey becoming increasingly experienced. The expedition is dynamic, with projects undergoing regular review to ensure they meet the needs of partners. Each project is tailored to the needs and restrictions of the area and the time of year. GVI aims to work towards these objectives:

- \* Collecting and analysing scientific data, and increasing scientific interest in the area.
- \* Increasing the conservation value of the area
- \* Improving community awareness and capacity
- \* Raising awareness and studying the effects of tourism
- \* Encouraging and contributing to local sustainable revenue.

After a comprehensive training period and a compulsory first aid course (certification optional at extra cost of \$35), the group rotate on the various projects. Below are the projects currently being undertaken:

1. **Jaguar Predation of Marine Turtles:** GVI Costa Rica has been conducting this research by request of MINAE since July 2005. Although most volunteers only have the opportunity to conduct this research once in their stay, for most it is one of their highlights. The aim of this project is to determine whether predation of marine turtles by jaguars (*Panthera onca*) in TNP is having an impact on the marine turtle populations. Data collection consists of walking 14.5 miles on the beach of the National Park in the heat, and participation is therefore selection-based due to health and safety precautions and the need for physical fitness.

2. **Jaguar, Mammal and Prey Species Abundance Study:** GVI sets up camera traps, and conducts transects recording tracks and signs in the National Park forest in order to estimate the seasonal frequency of jaguars (*Panthera onca*) and the availability of prey species in the area.

3. **Marine Turtle Monitoring and Conservation Program (March – October):** GVI are assisting in the monitoring of nesting green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in order to record their spatial and seasonal distribution, monitor the number of nests, determine the level of illegal poaching on turtles and their nests, record hatchling emergence and hatching success rates, track re-emergences to the nesting beach and or migration between beaches, and register tourist and human development around the nesting site. At different stages of the seasons, this project involves working directly with nesting females during night patrols or determination of nests status during daytime nest excavations after the predetermined hatchling period.

4. **Resident and Migratory Bird Research:** In collaboration with MINAE, GVI is monitoring 30 key aquatic bird species to collect long-term seasonal trend data on resident and migratory birds on canoe based surveys along canals in the National Park.

5. **Incidental Species Study:** GVI Costa Rica is recording incidental sightings of animals in the area of the station.. The aim of the study is to compile a species list and also maintain a record of the daily occurrences of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians sighted around the research station. By keeping a daily record of the occurrence of species, we can determine which species are seen most frequently and determine if there any changes in the frequency of sightings of certain species over time.

6. **National Scholarship Program:** GVI invites Costa Rican nationals to join an expedition in order to receive the same training and gain valuable skills and experiences along with the international volunteers.

GVI's aim is to conduct a research program supporting conservation in this biodiversity hotspot. By working with MINAE, GVI is assisting in obtaining vital data which will help management and, ultimately, conservation of animals like the majestic jaguar (*Panthera onca*) and the threatened sea turtles. Jaguars are roaming the beach of Tortuguero National Park and predated on marine turtles, but little is known about this unusual prey selection and, indeed, how many jaguars are present in the park. GVI is investigating further into this behaviour by continuing data collection on jaguar presence and predated turtles along the 14.5 mile stretch of beach bordering the park. In addition, GVI is trialling camera trapping techniques in order to identify individuals and to obtain an estimate of the abundance of jaguars on the beach and in the bordering forest.

During the turtle season, GVI is assisting the CCC with the monitoring of nesting green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in order to record their spatial and seasonal distribution, monitor the number of nests, determine the level of illegal poaching on turtles and their nests, record hatchling hatching success rates, track re-emergences to the nesting beach and or migration between beaches.

At different stages of the seasons, this project involves working directly with nesting females during night patrols or determination of nests status during daytime nest excavations after the predetermined hatchling period. This is an international conservation effort with support from many of the world's leading conservation authorities.

GVI has implemented a long-term bird monitoring programme in order to collect population data on resident and migratory birds in different sites and habitats. The data is collected and collated by GVI, with the aim of making annual raw data on bird presence and nesting behaviour available to other researchers or conservation organisations, and serve as a management tool for MINAE.

In order to help local capacity building, GVI offers Costa Rican nationals a chance to join the volunteers on the expedition and hence receive biological training and gain valuable skills and experience. Priority will be given to people who intend to live and work long-term in the conservation of the area.

## **Mera om expeditionen**

After almost five years of work in the area, GVI established a new research station inside Tortuguero National Park at the request of the Costa Rican Environment Ministry in January 2010. This station is the only dwelling inside the protected area, situated next to the second largest green sea turtle rookery in the world, in the southern extent of the Park Forest and is ideally placed to allow us to focus our ongoing unique research inside this idyllic National Park, on behalf of the Costa Rican government.

The base is small but comfortable, with space set aside for socialization, relaxation, and study. On base, we have flushing toilets, cold showers and basic laundry facilities. Being inside the National Park there is no mains electricity, there is a small generator and solar power for occasional use and mobile phone reception from the beach for official use and in case of emergencies. You will sleep in dormitories, with up to 6 people per room. The environment is hot and very humid, with the station grounds on the site of a traditional Costa Rican Coconut farm, sympathetically converted to function as a research station, surrounded by coconut palms, fruit trees and National Park forest behind, making it an excellent area to view wildlife. You will fall asleep to the sounds of the rainforest and Caribbean Sea and wake in the morning with the haunting call of the howler monkeys (the loudest land mammal).

All food is cooked and cleaning is done by the expedition team on a rotational basis. The food is basic, containing a lot of traditional rice and beans (Gallo Pinto, the national dish of Costa Rica), yet meat or fish is supplied around once a week. Occasional supply trips by boat to the village of Tortuguero offer access to all basic amenities. Luxurious tourist lodges are scattered up and down the river near Tortuguero and tourist boats can often be seen making their way along the river.

You will spend the majority of your time on the expedition conducting exciting research projects, collecting and collating data. All members of the expedition are also required to help with the running of the biological research station, which includes cooking (bring your favourite herbs and recipes!), maintenance and cleaning on a rotational basis. The days can be long, starting early in order to take advantage of the cool mornings and wildlife activity, and work continues throughout the day and night (in turtle season). Be warned that you will get very hot and sweaty during the day's activities, so ensure you come prepared (upon application you will receive a fully comprehensive field manual which contains a recommended kit list).

The first few weeks will be hard as you adapt to the change in environment and learn the different skills the projects require. Though not isolated, the expedition is in a fairly remote location so you will participate in first aid training (and can get certified in this if you wish), health and safety procedures, and you will learn about the area and the different study sites. These training courses are crucial as the environment has its hazards. You will be prepared thoroughly for any eventuality and your skills will be tested on a continuous basis. By the end of the expedition your sense of accomplishment will be astounding and you will be a competent researcher with many new skills to offer.

Those who choose to join this expedition may have the opportunity to:

- \* Learn a range of surveying techniques for wildlife research and put those skills to good use in the field, conducting biological surveys in both coastal and rainforest environments. This includes identifying key species of birds, mammals (including several monkey species), helping with marine turtle nesting and hatchling surveys

- \* Participate in jaguar research along remote regions and beaches, looking for the elusive animal and their signs, and helping with the camera trapping. A small number of people have got to see a jaguar in the wild, but this includes a lucky handful of GVI volunteers

- \* See prime turtle nesting beaches for green and leatherback turtles and watch them lay their eggs and return to the sea, then see the hatchlings emerge and make their way to the sea (seasonal)

- \* Canoe down tranquil jungle waterways on bird surveys and taking in the sounds, smells and amazing diversity of plants and trees of the dense jungle on either side and spotting monkeys, otters, toucans, caiman and turtles on the canals of the National Park

- \* Climb the Cerro Tortuguero – a short but testing jungle trail leading to the top of the only high point in the area, which gives you a fabulous view of the beach, Tortuguero, the vast tropical rainforest and the waterways

- \* Experience the beach under the stars, spotting caiman and turtles as well as other nocturnal species – something you will never forget!

- \* Share recipes from home and learn to cook for a large group of people

- \* Visit beautiful Costa Rica and learn about Tico traditions. Enjoy conversations with like-minded people from different countries and backgrounds

- \* Enjoy a well deserved rest in the hammocks on your time off

## Tidigare volontärer berättar

”Yesterday was my favourite day yet on the expedition. Four of us set out bright and early to set up the first mammal transect for the mammal project. We got dropped off at the end of the transect furthest from the station and to our surprise had to jump from the boat into the canal in order to get into the forest itself. After being in the jungle for only moments we saw our first wildlife, howler monkeys up in a tree. The majority of our day was spent wading through waist deep water and mud trying our hardest not to get stuck. We managed to find a fallen tree where we could take a little break and a grassy knoll to eat lunch on amidst all the water and mud. After lunch we continued wading through the transect passing many poison dart frogs along the way. Around the midpoint of the transect, the land is a bit higher and therefore drier but I somehow still managed to get water up my nose. As we neared the end of the transect we all agreed that this had been the most intense yet amazing day thus far on the expedition. The jungle is a huge and fascinating place and this was the perfect opportunity to explore it and to top it all off the transect can now be used to collect data.”

Jill Arnott

“One of the most amazing wildlife sightings I’ve had since I’ve been here was when we went to the National Park trail behind Tortuguero beach to set up jag camera traps in the rainforest. We were walking on the trail to where the cameras needed to be set up and it was tipping it down with rain when James suddenly told us all to stop. Up ahead there was a white-lipped peccary on the trail looking at us, it crossed to the other side and then suddenly there were more crossing the trail ahead of us and behind us too – we saw over 20 of them and could hear even more of them making strange clicking noises to the sides of us in the forest. It was awesome to see mammals so close in the wild, especially such a large herd, but it was even more amazing when I learnt that white-lipped peccary are endangered and it’s rare to see them here.”

Jessica Armistead

”Avigating Iriia (our beloved boat) down Caño Palma by flashlight, coming across Tortuguero lit up by a magnificently streaked sky, paddling across the mighty river Peñetencia; our canoe Luisa just a speck. Howler monkeys vocalizing their presence, mealy parrots squawking overhead; all before the survey has even begun.

Dawn breaks and flocks appear; little blue herons and companions, the snowy egrets. Green ibis alert us to the treetops with a monkey/ chicken-like call. Lanky legged northern jacanas dart amongst the vegetation and green backed herons stir up a commotion. Out of nowhere appears a mystery bird; notes are compared, books are consulted and it is found to be the never before recorded, juvenile tri-coloured heron. Then, a boat billed heron, an otter rolling in the mud, caiman gliding through the dark water with a blank stare, a petite sungrebe takes flight, kingfishers whiz by and a bare-throated tiger heron booms; the sights to be seen and the sounds to be heard on the canals of Tortuguero; simply stunning.”

Brook McIntyre

## Vilken skillnad gör denna expedition?

The work carried out by GVI Costa Rica takes a holistic approach to the conservation of the area, helping to monitor every ecosystem of this incredibly diverse area: forest, canal, beach and sea. We continue to increase knowledge of jaguars and their predation of marine turtles, through active management have achieved massive reductions in marine turtle nest poaching, and help monitor populations of birds, marine turtles and large mammals. Data collected by GVI has also been used by MINAE in the latest management plan for the wildlife refuge. Our National Scholarship Program has helped several nationals gain employment in ecotourism and conservation.

## Höjdpunkter

Getting the chance to go on this unique adventure in a Costa Rican National Park; enjoying life at the research station; learning about the wildlife and their habitat; seeing unique wildlife in marine and coastal rainforest environments, including sea turtles, monkeys, neo-tropical birds and amphibians; exploring the area by boat and canoe, including remote Caribbean beaches, gaining a wide variety of skills, including learning survey techniques and gaining real field experience, joining the research team to undertake turtle nesting surveys and monitor nesting sites during turtle season; participating on jaguar surveys; setting up and checking camera traps and tracking in the rainforest.

## Plats

The expedition base is situated at the southern extent of Tortuguero National Park, within lush emerald rainforest that is the home to a rich variety of wildlife, including monkeys, caiman and otters. As there is no road access in the region the expedition base is reached by motor boat through stunning canals and rivers and finally a 20 minute walk along a forest trail. The National Park beach and ocean waters containing a rich variety of marine life is just a stone's throw from the base complex. Tortuguero, a typical sleepy Caribbean village, with a population of about 800, made up of Costa Ricans, Nicaraguans and descendents from the Caribbean Islands is about a one and a half hour ride by motor boat from the station. You should be able to visit Tortuguero about once every 2 weeks during supply runs.

The forest itself is one of the largest areas of protected tropical wet forest in Costa Rica, and the beach along Tortuguero is home to one of the largest nesting colonies of green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) in the world. It is a greatly important beach, with roughly 25,000 females coming to it to nest each year, as well as three other endangered or critically endangered species of marine turtles.

Relative to its small size, Costa Rica contains more species of plants and animals than any other country in the world and its wildlife is distinctly accessible – one of the things Costa Rica is so well known for. This amazing biodiversity is partly due to the amazingly wide variety of landscapes Costa Rica contains due to its geographical location, as the centre of two huge continental masses and a barrier between two oceans in the tropics. It is truly an amazing part of the world to visit and experience, and an incredibly worthwhile area in which to work on conservation projects.

## Ute i fält

Accommodation is pleasantly rustic and dormitory-style, in a beautiful clearing of the forest which has wildlife viewing opportunities that are second to none! All food will be prepared by the expedition team on a rotational basis, and basic but typically local food will be the staple diet. There is a generator for electricity part of the day in the main buildings, hand washing laundry facilities, and running (cold) water, which means there are flushing toilets and refreshingly cool showers.

## Utbildning

GVI's training is comprehensive and second to none, providing volunteers with amazing new skills and experience that is an asset to anyone's CV/resumé. The first week is intense as it contains the majority of the training program, which includes presentations, lectures, group study, talks, exams and lots of practical field experience. However, training is continuous and will be gained throughout the expedition, based on further practical experience in the field and with the communities. The initial training provides volunteers with a baseline understanding of all aspects of the rainforest and coastline on which to build throughout your stay. Subjects you will cover in the training can include: conservation, tropical forest ecology, rainforest health and safety, surveying techniques (protocols), key species identification and biology and an internationally recognised first aid course.

## Förkunskaper

Although knowing Spanish is not essential for this expedition, volunteers who have a little knowledge of Spanish find it beneficial as they are able to interact with the local community more freely. All volunteers should be physically fit as the environment is demanding due to the heat and humidity and the activities involve a lot of strenuous walking. Volunteers should also be enthusiastic and have a good sense of humour. It is important to be self-motivated throughout the project and all volunteers must be team players who are adaptable and willing to assist each other and the staff to complete the daily tasks. Volunteers must be aware that, because of the location of the expedition site, transport is only by motorised boats and canoes. For this reason, all volunteers must be strong swimmers, able to swim 200m fully clothed. Locals do not swim in the sea due to very strong rip tides that Tortuguero is known for, and we follow the example they set: people can wade but should not swim.

## Vad du får för kvalifikationer

Amongst many others: First Aid & CPR training (certification optional); GPS, marine radio and camera trap use; wildlife identification skills; Tropical forest ecology; wildlife biology and conservation; time management; interpersonal skills; cooking for large groups; canoe skills. Numerous scientific techniques are taught depending on season and what work is being conducted, these can include: collection of biometric data; transect work; direct counts; incidental observations; tourist & human impact surveys; camera trapping; track identification; work with endangered and critically endangered species; and data entry.



*En expeditionsdeltagare  
med en nykläckt  
sköldpaddunge*

## Annat du kan göra under expeditionen

There are a number of possibilities for exploring Costa Rica further. These include the following ideas:

- \* Admire the world famous and active Arenal Volcano from a distance, and relax in the natural hot springs, go horseback riding, and visit the waterfall
- \* Surf the Salsa Brava – a hotspot of the Caribbean for the advanced surfer
- \* Visit Irazu Volcano and discover coffee farms on the way back to San Jose
- \* Ride horseback on the beach in Puerto Viejo or simply enjoy miles and miles of beautiful beaches kissed by palm trees
- \* Spot migratory raptor birds in the Talamanca Mountains and visit indigenous villages to learn more about their amazing culture
- \* Go deep sea fishing in the Caribbean Sea
- \* Enjoy the organised wildlife tours of Braulio Carrillo National Park
- \* Discover the cloud forest at Monteverde, visit the hummingbird gallery, enjoy the locally made ice cream and other fresh dairy products or walk among the treetops on the hanging bridges
- \* Travel across the country to discover the beautiful Pacific Coast with its sunny beaches
- \* Spend a relaxing weekend in the capital San Jose, while visiting the Gold Museum or the Jade Museum or attending a play in one of the numerous theatres

## Foton från expeditionen



*Vems fotspår kan detta vara?*

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